

# Scott M. Matheson Junior High School 3650 South Montclair Street Magna, Utah 84044

**April 19-20, 2006** 



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

# THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

# Scott M. Matheson Junior High School 3650 South Montclair Street Magna, Utah 84044

April 19-20, 2006

### **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

# DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 19-20, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Scott M. Matheson Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Alan Bailey is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Scott M. Matheson Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Scott M. Matheson Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Sharon Prescott	Senior Director, Elementary School Services
Mary Alice Rudelich	Director, Curriculum

# SCOTT MATHESON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

# **ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF**

# **School Administration**

	Principa Assistant Principa
·	ınseling
Alena Stejskal	Counselor
Allen Turner	Counselor
Kriste Winter	Counselor

# **Support Staff**

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Chrissy Lassen	Jody Tyler
Vincente Martinez	Piuela Vailea
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Andrew Olsen	Stephanie Weight
JoAnn Palmer	Teresita Zapata
Diana Pennington	
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	Luanne Jensen Chrissy Lassen Vincente Martinez Shanna Montgomery Brad Nielsen Andrew Olsen JoAnn Palmer Diana Pennington Suzy Peterson

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#### MATHESON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

#### MISSION STATEMENT

The focus of Matheson Junior High is to create a safe environment, provide excellent educational opportunities for diverse learners, and encourage responsible citizenship.

Teachers, administrators, parents and the community share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- 1. All students can learn.
- 2. Students' learning needs should be the primary focus of all decisions impacting the work of the school.
- 3. Each student is a valued individual with unique social, physical, emotional, and intellectual needs.
- 4. Students learn in different ways and should be provided with a variety of instructional approaches to support their learning.
- 5. Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process.
- 6. A safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- 7. The staff at Matheson Junior High recognizes the importance of teaching the five values recommended by the Community of Caring and support them by advising, discussing and modeling he appropriate behaviors.
- 8. A student's self-esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among and between students and staff.
- 9. Alternative programs are an integral part of Matheson Junior High, and are necessary in order to meet the needs of <u>all</u> students.
- 10. The commitment to continuous improvement is imperative if our school is going to enable students to become confident, self-directed, lifelong learners.
- 11. Teachers, administrators, parents and the community share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission.

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Craig Jessop, Rocky Mountain Junior High School, Weber School District, Visiting Team Chair

Barry Jones, South Ogden Junior High, Weber School District
Roberto Jimenez, Midvale Middle School, Jordan School District
Nancy Essary, St. Francis Xavier School, Utah Catholic Schools
Linda Cook, Millcreek Junior High School, Davis School District
Travis Hamblin, West Jordan Middle School, Jordan School District
Michael Goodman, Mount Jordan Middle School, Jordan School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

### SCOTT M. MATHESON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

### **CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE**

Scott M. Matheson Junior High School, located in Magna in the western part of the Salt Lake valley, opened its classrooms for student learning in August of 2002. As a "new" school, Matheson Junior High is still developing its own culture, climate, and learning environment. The 942 students come from Magna and West Valley City. Students come from a wide spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds. The annual median household income for the area is approximately \$44,000. Many students come from single-parent families or extended family member guardianships, or live with grandparents. Over 60 percent of Matheson Junior High's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Special education students make up about 10 percent of the student population; 18 percent are limited English proficient (LEP) students. The student population represents a varied ethnic mix: 19 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Pacific Islander, and 4 percent other ethnic minorities. The student mobility rate is 32 percent, a slight decline since the school opened.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Matheson Junior High School is just four years old. It has, during that short time, brought together communities, students, and faculty members to form a united school community with one goal: to educate students and give them opportunities for a bright future.

This melding has taken place despite many students coming from single-parent homes, or living with grandparents or with an extended family member guardian. Free and reduced-price lunch status has climbed from 45 percent in 2002, when the school opened, to more than 60 percent in 2005.

Matheson Junior High has looked at a considerable amount of data from national and core tests. In addition, the leadership team polled parents, students, and teachers on a number of questions regarding the performance of the school. Most of the survey results showed satisfaction with the school's performance. There is a wide variety of clubs, programs, teams, and interventions designed to influence students for good and to assist them during their adolescent years.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The data that is available needs to be disaggregated in order for the school to more effectively initiate and continue programs that help students achieve. It would be very helpful to those who read the profile for the school to draw conclusions based on the data gathered and include those conclusions with the numerous graphs, charts, and survey results. The Visiting Team also recommends that continued departmental analyses and student assessments be included in the profile and used to guide the direction of the school.

## **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Consider narrowing the focus of the desired results for student learning (DRSLs) to make them more manageable. Explore how the DRSLs can become a part of daily teaching in every department and how the progress toward those DRSLs can be tracked and converted into useable data.
- Continue departmental analysis of strengths and weaknesses to facilitate the implementation of the DRSLs within the curriculum.
- Analyze individual programs in an attempt to determine their influence on student progress and success.

### **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

- a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?
  - The members of the school staff have been very involved in the entire process. Each faculty member was involved in some aspect of the self-study. The various portions were then shared and approved by the entire school community. Unfortunately, community members did not have a great deal of involvement. This community has many families in which both parents work. There were few who were willing or able to give of their time. The data gathered needs to be further disaggregated in order to be most useful.
- b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?
  - The school's self-study reveals many of the school's strengths, but some aspects of the study make little mention of weaknesses or areas to be concentrated on. The Visiting Team found that more data is needed across the curriculum in order to better enhance educational progress.

# CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Matheson Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

### **Social Competence**

Students will demonstrate social competence by:

- a. Number of positive interactions
- b. Participation in healthy community-building activities
- c. Participation in leadership opportunities
- d. Cultural awareness displayed appropriately

### **Healthy Lifestyle**

Students will demonstrate healthy lifestyle competence by:

- a. Gaining adequate rest and nutrition
- b. Performing personal exercise
- c. Displaying appropriate personal hygiene
- d. Making positive life choices:
  - 1. Drugs
  - 2. Alcohol
  - 3. Tobacco

## **Intellectual Competence**

Students will demonstrate intellectual competence by:

- a. Demonstrating developed thinking skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy
- b. Communicating freely both verbally and in writing
  - 1. Read and write on or above grade level
- c. Developing tools and strategies for life long learning including:
  - 1. Organizational skills
  - 2. Synthesis
  - 3. Problem-solving skills

## **Emotional Competence**

Students will demonstrate emotional competence by being:

- a. Empathetic
- b. Stable
- c. Respectful
- d. Demonstrate coping skills
- e. Confident
- f. Will believe in IALAC (I am lovable and capable)

### Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

A consensus-building process was established to involve the school community in defining the school's beliefs, mission, and goals. Feedback was collected from Matheson Junior High School's stakeholders and utilized in developing the mission, beliefs, and goals. The development of the beliefs, mission, and goals has worked to provide ongoing collegiality among the faculty and staff and given them an enthusiasm to move forward to meet the needs of their students. The administration has acknowledged that representation of students and parents was not as inclusive as they had hoped in the development of the beliefs, mission, and goals.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

The belief statements developed by the stakeholders of Matheson Junior High demonstrate the community's commitment to the growth of its students. The mission statements and beliefs are integrated throughout the school in text, and are also lived by the faculty and the students in their actions and words. The administration, faculty, and students value the experience they are receiving as the process prepares the students for continuous academic and personal improvement. A variety of means have been used to effectively communicate the school's mission and beliefs, including posters and a school assembly.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

There is clear alignment between Matheson Junior High School's mission statement and beliefs. In continuing to align the DRSLs with the mission and beliefs, the school needs to determine and take into account pertinent student achievement and behavioral data to create measurable outcomes.

### **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The staff at Matheson Junior High School works in a variety of different team formations that allow them to collaborate on curriculum design and

implementation. The school's climate is conducive to learning; this is apparent from the mutual respect between student and adult, the extremely well kept building, and the positive attitudes of adults and students. The resulting environment is one that fosters student involvement and ownership throughout all areas and interests of the school.

Departments at the school are working with the Cyprus network to establish Power Standards. These standards have been established, using the State Core, to combat the transience of students within the Cyprus network, as well as to establish a set guide for teachers to use to "normalize" curricula throughout the network. The main aspect of Power Standards is to have common assessments throughout the network; however, these assessments have not yet been established. It is the recommendation of the Visiting Team that these assessments be developed and implemented as soon as possible.

Teaming at Matheson Junior High occurs, but is not at the level of full implementation. The seventh grade team consists of language arts, reading, and science, with limited involvement from the history class. The eighth grade teams are fully functioning with language arts, science, and history, with each team having a common consulting period to conduct team planning and business. The remainder of the faculty teams in either their departments and/or grade levels. The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty consider implementing an interdisciplinary curriculum throughout the school, with specific emphasis on including the history classes on the seventh grade teams.

Curriculum mapping has occurred within the English Department and the existing interdisciplinary teams. Teachers expressed a desire to have more time to meet and continue their work with curriculum mapping and planning. Additionally, teachers expressed a desire to have more time for professional learning and curriculum development. The Visiting Team recommends an evaluative look at specific needs, using assessment data, to determine activities that foster further opportunities for curriculum mapping, professional learning, and curriculum development.

The current block schedule lends itself to increased use of varied teaching techniques and practices conducive to student learning. Teachers have expressed that the block schedule allows them to develop relationships in a more meaningful way with students while at the same time implementing more interactive activities. Students expressed their satisfaction with the way the current block schedule allows them to develop relationships and allows more time to do their homework. Although the block schedule lends itself to increased class sizes, it fosters teaming and common consulting periods.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

Teachers articulated a clear vision for school-wide implementation of the DRSLs: Social Competence, Healthy Lifestyle, Intellectual Competence, and Emotional Competence. Teachers' expectations of these DRSLs pertaining to student learning were clearly visible and have been discussed openly during class time, as well as being visually represented in the classroom setting.

Friday early-out days have been used to establish and evaluate the accreditation process. The Visiting Team recommends that these days be used in the future for facilitating teacher-requested professional development opportunities to further collaborative development of curriculum and instructional strategies.

# **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

The professional staff and administration have designed and implemented a variety of learning experiences for students to align instruction to meet student needs and learning styles. One of the challenges at Matheson Junior High is a relatively high number of students who do not speak English as their mother tongue. Teachers are aware of this and use different learning experiences to help these students. Students are also exposed to labs, field trips, homework assistance, rewards, clubs, and, for those who are on the edge of not succeeding, a special class just to help them get started.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

The professional staff uses a wide variety of instructional strategies to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn even though their learning styles vary. The Visiting Team observed small group interaction, peer instruction, lecture, modeling, deductive reasoning, and presentations by students, to name some of the observed strategies. The variety helped most students become engaged in learning; they appeared to be focused on what was happening in the classroom, and were actively participating in the instruction regardless of which strategy was being employed.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

Students at Matheson Junior High have several opportunities to learn material, get assistance, and find success in their learning. Students stated emphatically that teachers were there for them and genuinely interested in their well being.

Students who need extra help can attend the homework club four days a week after school. Two staff members are in attendance to assist them in any of their subject areas. Teachers are available before and after school to assist students in their individual curricular areas.

Students are monitored, and those who are most at risk for failure are invited to join a special class designed to jump-start them to success. Students who enter the class must do so with the goal in mind that they will succeed. Parents are also involved in placing the students in the class, and must support their students.

Elementary feeder schools are asked to provide data on incoming students so that they may receive help early in their junior high years.

### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

The school has taken good initial steps towards the establishment of an assessment system of student performance; however, they need to continue to work on adopting or developing specific, valid, and reliable assessment tools of the student achievement both school-wide and for the individual classroom. This should not be limited to a few subject areas or to a single standardized battery. The Visiting Team commends the school's efforts to develop a wide variety of desired results for student learning (DRSLs); however, we would caution the school to perhaps narrow its focus in order to better assess student progress towards the DRSLs.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

Some of the assessment tools are already in place; however, Matheson Junior High needs to have a clear understanding of what the expectations are for student learning. The school expectations need to be measurable, and the assessment tools must meet the criteria of validity and reliability.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The Visiting Team is confident that the staff of Matheson Junior High will continue to design, develop, and administer the assessments in a fair and equitable manner.

Students have confidence and trust in the faculty and staff's ability to provide a positive environment for learning. Parents are pleased with the work and efforts

of the faculty and staff with regard to fairness and equity in the assessment of their pupils.

The Visiting Team recommends that the disaggregation of data be done for every indicator of student achievement, and not only for academic performance.

## **Leadership for School Improvement:**

- a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?
  - The school has established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are supported. The leadership makes a concerted effort to develop the abilities of staff members through professional development.
- b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?
  - The action steps for the school improvement plan are partially aligned with the goals for improvement. Currently, alignment of the action plan with data and research is lacking total agreement, but the school recognizes the need for alignment and is taking the necessary steps. The leadership and staff are knowledgeable and seem to work together in a collaborative effort.
- c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?
  - The school has implemented a new computer grading system that allows teachers, students, and parents to track the progress of students and see how well they are performing in class. Students can find out immediately how they are doing through this program. Although the program seems to be a success, a few teachers are having problems with it. The counselors are in the process of accessing and monitoring each student's progress while working with staff members and parents to provide help where needed. One obstacle that is hurting the success of students at the school is a lack of parental involvement. The leadership and staff have recognized this problem and are implementing programs to get parents more involved in the educational process.
- d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?
  - School-wide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission, and are intentionally designed for the purpose of maximizing

student learning. The school is organized for student and staff success in achieving the school's goals. Throughout the school are posters directed at promoting a safe school. All indications are that this is a school where students are safe and are offered a rigorous and comprehensive educational program.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

One of the strengths of this school is the commitment of the administration to use whatever resources are available to help achieve student success for the school. Through the accreditation process, the administrators have aligned their resources with the school goals.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The leadership of the school encourages commitment, participation, and collaboration. The Visiting Team felt there was collaboration throughout the school, from the administration to the staff members. As mentioned before, there is a need for more parental involvement, and the school is making progress in having parents take a more active role in education of their children. The administration has communicated to parents and the community that their input and participation are important to the success of the school.

### **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

Given Matheson Junior High's brief history, it is admirable that the school has created the sense of community that exists here. A tremendous number of programs have been designed to help students develop talents and interests, as well as to reward academic and social progress. Because of teachers' open-door policies, their sincere concern and listening, and the time they spend in advising groups, students feel that adults in the school truly care about them. Students are also impressed with the attendance of administrators at their after-school activities and productions, and they perceive the administration to be firm, yet fair. Faculty members report a good working relationship among themselves and with the administration, and they appreciate the support they receive from administrators for their departments and with student discipline issues.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

Matheson Junior High has joined with other schools in the Cyprus High School cone to create Power Standards to assure vertical alignment. Data from the elementary schools enables appropriate placement of incoming seventh graders. There are two business partnerships which help to fund programs, and representatives from various occupations serve as guest speakers to provide career information to students. Parent-teacher conferences, SEOP conferences, Back to School Night, multicultural programs, and evening guest speakers on issues of interest to parents serve to bring adults into the school to help them see what is available to support their children's learning.

The Teacher Leadership Cadre brings trainers into the school to provide instruction in areas where faculty members have expressed a need for growth. Conference attendance is encouraged, with attendees sharing information upon their return.

Parent support is seen in the PTSA, Community Council, and assistance with drama and musical productions, as well as the Tiger Extravaganza, which brings families and future Matheson Junior High students to the campus to view the many opportunities for development to be found there.

# **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The faculty at Matheson Junior High School is strongly committed to professional development to improve student learning. Currently, 67 percent of the staff has earned advanced degrees or special endorsements, while 47 percent of the other staff members are in the process of gaining advanced degrees or special endorsements. The administration has supported professional development by providing funds for teachers to attend district, state, and professional organization-sponsored seminars and workshops. All the social studies teachers and many of the language arts teachers have attended the History Academy. Weekly school in-service time is built into the school schedule. In the past, much of the on-site training has been principal directed, but the faculty has started taking a larger role in directing its own professional development through a teacher leadership cadre organized by the administration.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The administration, faculty, and support staff at Matheson Junior High School are excited about the positive school climate for productive change and continuous

improvement that developed at the school through the accreditation process. While many teachers commented on how difficult and painful the process was for them and their colleagues, they see the long-term benefits for their students from the collaboration, collegiality, and cooperative spirit that were created through this process. The Visiting Team feels that the stakeholders at Matheson Junior High School are committed to making necessary changes to continuously improve student learning.

# CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, only by the Utah State Office of Education—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

### CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

The action plan is divided into three major components: improving academic achievement in literacy and numeracy, improving school climate, and increasing community involvement. The scope of these action steps in quite broad, but they adequately address the critical areas for follow-up. The action plan as a whole is well thought out and covers many of the areas of concern that will make the school more effective.

The Visiting Team's concern for the broadness of the DRSLs could, to a large degree, be eliminated if the DRSLs were more concise and aligned with the action plan. In short, the action plan seems to cover the needs of the school in a more practical way than the DRSLs do.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The school has made tremendous strides toward unifying the staff and the students. Along with this unification have come a vision and a commitment to the process. Teachers stated on numerous occasions how much the process of accreditation had had a positive effect on the unification of the staff. They are committed to seeing the accreditation plan proceed.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

The process is established within the faculty and the administration. The community members who are aware of the plan also support what has happened and what is planned for the future.

The school needs to move forward with caution, so that not too many of the action steps are attempted at one time, which could cause the faculty to become discouraged or overwhelmed.

# CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

## **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the students, teachers, and patrons for the safe learning environment that has been established at Matheson Junior High.
- The Visiting Team commends the climate of trust and acceptance at Matheson Junior High. The students at Matheson Junior High trust their teachers and feel that teachers and staff are available to help them, and that teachers genuinely care about them personally.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and administration at Matheson Junior High for instilling a sense of school pride among the students.
- The Visiting Team commends and recognizes that Matheson Junior High has worked through many struggles to achieve its current levels of unity, collegiality, and sense of team. Despite having several different communities coming together when the school was built, the faculty and administration at Matheson Junior High have pulled the student community together so that students and teachers identify themselves with Matheson Junior High.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty at Matheson Junior High for genuinely wanting to improve for the sake of student achievement, and for being willing to give of themselves to see that that happens.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school devise a system of data collection across the curriculum that will enable departments to focus on specific weaknesses.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school revisit departmental analyses of strengths and weaknesses to facilitate the implementation of the DRSLs within the curriculum.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school narrow the focus of the DRSLs to make them more manageable.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue the development of tools to assess student progress toward the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school regularly publish a parent newsletter to facilitate communication of school events and activities.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to build and enhance interdisciplinary teaming.